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AUTHOR Meredith, William H.; Abbott, Douglas A.
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ABSTRACT

Although parenting is seen as one of the major roles most adults undertake in their lives, satisfaction with this role has received relatively little attention in past research. A study was conducted to examine parenting satisfaction as it relates to residence in an urban or rural setting. Urban (N=395) and rural (N=115) parents completed a survey instrument in which they rated their self-perceived parentiing satisfaction as well as their life satisfaction, marital satisfaction, and quality of their parenting. The results revealed a significant difference in parenting satisfaction between urban and rural subjects, with 79% of the urban sample reporting satisfaction with parenting compared to 87% of the rural sample. Ten variables including place of residence were placed into a stepwise multiple regression equation. Place of residence failed to enter the regression equation and was not a significant predictor of parent satisfaction. Thirty specific satisfactions were placed into a separate regression to predict parent satisfaction. Individual satisfactions were found to have little predictive value. Measures that did account for much of the variance were other self-perceived evaluations such as life satisfaction and marital satisfaction. (Author/NB)

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SATISFACTION WITH PARENTING: A COMPARISION OF URBAN AND RURAL SAMPLES

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William H. Meredith, Ph.D.

Douglas A. Abbott, Ph.D.

Department of Human Development and the Family

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

CG 020137

William H. Meredith

110 Ruth Leverton Hall

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Lincoln, Nebraska 68583-0811

Phone (402) 472-1650

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined parenting satisfaction as it relates to residence in an urban or rural setting. A sample of 395 urban parents and 115 rural parents responded to an author-designed survey instrument. Seventy-nine percent of the urban sample was satisfied with parenting compared to 87 percent of the rural sample. Analysis of variance revealed a significant difference in parenting satisfaction between the two samples. Ten variables including place of residence were placed into a stepwise multiple regression equation. Place of residence failed to enter the regression equation and was not a significant predictor of parent satisfaction. Thirty specific satisfactions were placed into a separate regression to predict parent satisfaction. However, the individual satisfactions had little predictive value. Measures that did account for much of the variance were other self-perceived evaluations such as life satisfaction and marriage satisfaction.

Key terms: parenting, parent, satisfactions

SATISFACTION WITH PARENTING: A COMPARISON OF URBAN AND RURAL SAMPLES

INTRODUCTION

Parenting is seen as one of the major roles most adults undertake in their lives. However, satisfaction with this role has received relatively little attention in past research. Chilman; Meredith, Cacioppo, and Stinnett; Campbell; and Mullis and Mullis have looked at parenting satisfaction in general.[1-5] The Chilman and Meredith, et al., studies have examined characteristics of satisfied and dissatisfied parents as well. Other studies have focused on more limited aspects of the issue, such as Russell, and Goth-Owens, Stollak, Messe, Peshkess, and Watts.[6-7] These authors examined the problems as well as the gratifications of having infants. Hoffman and Manis studied the satisfactions and dissatisfactions of parenthood, but wrote relatively little about the satisfactions.[8] Other studies have looked at the values of children for parents.[8-10]

The present study examined parenting satisfaction as it relates to residence in an urban or rural setting. Are parents more satisfied when they live in rural areas or in an urban environment? While little previous research has been found concerning rural-urban differences in parent satisfaction, it was hypothesized that rural parents would be more satisfied with parenting than their urban counterparts as a result of what was thought to be a simpler, more child-oriented lifestyle where fewer activities which interfere with parent-child involvement and contact exist. With the extended family in rural areas often living nearby, more mutual help is available. Urban environments can provide families

with more distractions in terms of activities which makes for a more fragmented family life with less parent-child sharing and involvement. Other adults often take over many of the parenting responsibilities. This in turn, it was hypothesized, would reduce parenting satisfaction. Mullis and Mullis analyzed urban-rural differences using percentages only and concluded there were no differences in parent satisfaction.[5] However, it was thought the use of more sophisticated statistical methods might reveal significant differences between urban and rural parents on satisfaction with parenting. In addition to the urban-rural question, this research project attempted to expand the knowledge available in terms of understanding what contributes to parent satisfaction.

METHODS

A nonrandom sample of 253 fathers and 257 mothers living in all parts of Nebraska was used for this study. All the parents were married and had children at home. The urban sample of 395 was drawn from Omaha, Nebraska, a metropolitan area of more than a half-million people. The rural sample of 115 came from 12 Nebraska communities scattered across the state. The nonurban communities studied ranged in population from 150 to generally less than 20,000. The rural group was better educated than the urban group, but in terms of income, parent age, number of children and age of oldest child, the samples were very similar. The majority of the respondents had some college or trade school education and had incomes between $10,000 and $30,000. More than 80% of the parents surveyed were between 20 and 40 years old. Ninety percent of the parents had 3 or fewer children.

Parents were asked to rate their self-perceived parent satisfaction as well as their life satisfaction, marital satisfaction, and quality of their parenting on an author-designed questionnaire. Chilman used a four-item scale, Mullis and Mullis a fourteen-item scale, and Campbell a one-item scale to measure parent satisfaction.[4,5,12] As reliability and validity had not been previously established on any instrument, it was determined that the survey would use a straightforward one-item measure: How would you rate your satisfaction with being a parent? A nine-point satisfaction/dissatisfaction scale was used.[11] Each scale could be grouped into three general categories: (a) satisfied, (b) neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and (c) dissatisfied.

Respondents were also given a checklist of 30 potential satisfactions with parenting and told to check their 10 most important satisfactions. The list was, in part, drawn from the past research done on parent satisfactions and the values of children for parents.[2,6,8,9,10] The questionnaire was pretested with 30 parents, which resulted in some changes to improve the clarity of the items and to simplify the responses.

The data were analyzed by using analysis of variance, multiple regression, and the chi square methods of analysis. Because the nature of the study was exploratory, the confidence level of $p = < .05$ or better was adopted as the criterion for significant differences.

RESULTS

Analysis of variance revealed a significant difference in parenting satisfaction between urban ($\underline{M}$=2.77) and nonurban ($\underline{M}$=2.40) respondents (see Table 1). Urban residents were less satisfied with parenting than

were their rural counterparts. Community size was arbitrarily then broken down into three categories to see if this trend would continue to hold. Large-size communities were considered to have 30,000 or more people, middle-size were between 2,000 and 30,000 and small communities were less than 2,000. When communities were divided into three size categories, the means for parent satisfaction followed a progression of increasing parent satisfaction as the size of the community decreased: large ($\underline{M}$=2.76), middle ($\underline{M}$=2.65), small ($\underline{M}$=2.23).

Seventy-nine percent of the urban sample was satisfied with parenting compared to 87% of the rural sample. The results compare favorably to the 80% satisfaction rate Campbell found with a nationwide sample.[4]

Ten variables - residence (rural or urban), parent age (number of years), education (number of years), income (in dollars), number of children, parental sex, age of the oldest child, life satisfaction, marital satisfaction, and perceived quality of parenting - were placed into a stepwise multiple regression formula to determine what combination of variables best predicted the dependent variable, parent satisfaction. Place of residence failed to enter the regression equation and was not a significant predictor of parent satisfaction. Separate regressions were run for the urban and rural parents. Since no meaningful differences were found, the parents were grouped together to run the regression equation for predicting parent satisfaction. For the total group of 510 parents, marital satisfaction explained 35.2% of the variance. Perceived quality of parenting added 3.7%, life satisfaction 2.8%,

family size 1.6%, education 1.2%, age of the oldest child 0.7%, and income 0.7% (see Table 2). The total variance explained was 45.8%. Sex of the parent and age of the parent, along with urban or rural residence, failed to assist in predicting parent satisfaction.

The 30 specific satisfactions with parenting (see Table 3 for items) were placed into a second stepwise multiple regression to predict the level of parenting satisfaction, but no single satisfaction was able to account for more than 3% of the variance in parent satisfaction. Eight of the single satisfactions explained just 12% of the variance.

Several statistically significant differences were found between the urban and nonurban samples on the Satisfactions of Parenting Checklist (see Table 3). Rural parents were more likely than urban parents to mark "pride in children's achievements," "companionship," "fun to do things with," and "meeting new friends through their children" as important satisfactions. Urban residents were more likely to check "having children makes me feel closer to my spouse," "feel needed," and "adds stability to life."

The Satisfactions with Parenting Checklist is useful in understanding what adults find satisfying with parenting. A review of Table 3 shows that more than 40% of the parents checked the following: "watching children grow and develop," "love for children," "pride in children's achievements," "enjoying physical contact," "passing on values," "fun to do things with," "a growth experience." Fewer than 10% checked "reliving childhood," "doing what is expected of me," "security for old age," "less boredom in life," and "feeling more adult."

DISCUSSION

Based on ANOVA, the hypothesis that there was a significant difference between the means in parenting satisfaction between parents living in urban and rural settings was accepted. However, even though the means were statistically different, the difference may have a somewhat limited relevance because their actual difference on the scale used was small. Also, a one-item scale may not be a valid measure of parent satisfaction.

The present research is the first study on parent satisfaction to examine the predictive value of the variables under consideration by means of stepwise multiple regression. Past studies have used tests of significance only. The regression results showed that place of residence could not be used to predict parent satisfaction, though a small correlation was found in this research between parent satisfaction and place of residence. Given a different research design with several items forming a parenting satisfaction scale with established reliability, it is possible that place of residence might enter the regression equation.

Multiple regression results revealed that marital satisfaction alone predicted 35.2% of the variance in parent satisfaction. Life satisfaction and self-perceived quality of parenting, both of which were closely correlated with marital satisfaction, contributed 3.0% and 4.0% of the variance respectively. Demographic variables such as urban or rural residence, education, income, number of children, parent's sex, age of the oldest child, and age of parent contribute little to the prediction equation explaining less than 5%.

Based on a separate multiple regression analysis, the individual

satisfactions from the Satisfactions with Parenting Checklist added little to the prediction of parent satisfaction. However, a look at those individual satisfactions that were significantly different between the urban and rural parents did show the expected child-oriented nature of the rural parents as predicted.

It would appear from the results that internal perceptions of marriage and life in general are more highly related to parent satisfaction than are demographic variables or individual parent satisfactions. Those who are satisfied with parenting are also satisfied with their marriages and life in general. Those dissatisfied with parenting are also apt to be unhappy with marriage and life.

Campbell reported similar findings in his nationwide research on the quality of American life.[4] Satisfaction with aspects of family life were affected very little by considerations of income, education, etc. He concluded that satisfaction with parenting and family life in general depends on personal qualities and only marginally on economic status. Using the chi square test of significance, Chilman also concluded that demographic variables were not significant - marital satisfaction and self-perceived quality of parenting were significant, however.[12]

Parent satisfaction, then, does not come so much from the specific perceived satisfactions of parenting or the residence and circumstances of one's life. Parent satisfaction appears to be part of a more generalized attitude toward life.

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TABLE 1

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FOR URBAN OR RURAL RESIDENCE AND PARENT SATISFACTION

CATEGORY	MEANS	SOURCE OF VARIATION	SUM OF SQUARES	DEGREES OF FREEDOM	MEAN SQUARES	F RATIO	F PROBABILITY
Urban	2.767	Between Groups	12.002	1	12.002	4.011	0.0457
Rural	2.400	Within Groups	1520.172	508	2.992		
			Total-1532.1745	509			

TABLE 2

PREDICTION OF PARENT SATISFACTION FROM NINE VARIABLES
USING STEPWISE MULTIPLE REGRESSION

VARIABLE	MULTIPLE R	R^2	R^2 CHANGE	B	BETA
Marital Satisfaction	.5937	.352	.353	.537	.594
Quality of Parenting	.624	.390	.037	.204	.206
Life Satisfaction	.646	.418	.028	.236	.214
Education	.656	.430	.012	.196	.112
Oldest Child's Age	.661	.437	.007	-.131	-.084
Number of Children	.673	.452	.016	.223	.150
Income	.676	.458	.005	-.109	-.077

N = 515

F = 0.0

TABLE 3

PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS MARKING SPECIFIC SATISFACTIONS
ON THE SATISFACTIONS WITH PARENTING CHECKLIST BASED ON RESIDENCE
(PARENTS COULD MARK UP TO TEN SATISFACTIONS)

	CHECKLIST	URBAN PARENTS	RURAL PARENTS
	Watching children grow and develop	73	81
	Love for children	66	67
*	Companionship	24	34
*	Pride in children's achievements	56	67
	Self-fulfillment (adds meaning to life)	38	39
	Shared marital project	30	36
	General enjoyment	42	45
	Hope for future	25	24
	Reliving childhood	5	4
	Passing on values	41	38
	Passing on family name	11	9
	Doing what is expected of me	7	3
	Pleasure for grandparents	17	14
	Security for old age	5	4
	Feeling of being part of a family	39	42
	Less boredom in life	8	13
	Relationship with my own parents closer	14	9
**	Meeting new friends through children	11	20
**	Feeling closer to spouse	42	29
	More things to talk to spouse about	15	12
	New appreciation for my own parents	24	22
*	Fun to do things with	44	54
	A purpose for living	24	32
	Enjoying the simple aspects of life	33	29
	Keeps me young	14	12
*	Feel needed	37	27
	Adds stability to life	23	16
	Feel more adult	6	4
	A growth experience	48	47
	Sharing	51	53
	Enjoying physical contact (hugging, etc.)	43	47
		n=395	n=115

* p=.05
** p=.01